

THE "-I'S" MAY HAVE IT AT THE END - PATRONYMS SHOULD BE AMENDED ONLY IF DEMONSTRABLY INCORRECT

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ABSTRACT

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There has been prolonged controversy over whether patronyms should have a single or double *i* as a termination; the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature clearly indicates that either a single or double *i* is acceptable, and also that the original spelling should be amended only if there are demonstrable errors. There is no scope for opinions on whether or not a particular author was or was not competent in Latin, or similar diversions, in determining the acceptability of original spellings of names.

KEYWORDS: taxonomy - nomenclature - fishes - birds - New Zealand.

INTRODUCTION

A primary function of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature is to provide stability in the nomenclature of animal species (ICZN 1985, p. xiv, para. (4), Mayr 1969). The Code is designed to protect scientific names from careless, frivolous, mischievous or random errors, to clearly and unambiguously establish the form that names should take, and to provide standards in case of uncertainty. Clearly this is a difficult task, and one that taxonomists have struggled with over many decades. The complexity of the Code is a product of these difficulties. Over a period of many years, there has been particular debate about the form that patronyms (scientific names that are derived from names of people) should take, a recent New Zealand contribution to that debate being by Holdaway (1990).

RECENT COMMENTARY ON PATRONYMS

Jennings (1982) argued that recent rulings by the International Commission of Zoological Nomenclature "makes it impossible to produce uniformity" in the formation of patronyms, leading to uncertainty and inconsistency in names like

gairdneri or *gairdnerii*, the specific name formerly used for the rainbow trout (McDowall 1988, 1989). However, in my view he failed to demonstrate why this is so, and his argument is primarily concerned with matters that the Code makes no provision for. His discussion is really largely a consequence of a decision by the Names of Fishes Committee of the American Fisheries Society (Robins *et al.* 1980) to take what I see to be a unilateral decision to apply the single *-i* ending, regardless of the original usage. It is germane to point out that Robins *et al.* (1980) also, however, noted that the scientific names used in the Checklist "with regard to spelling" reflect "the majority opinion of the Committee" (and so presumably not necessarily what the Code prescribes). They also state that they found the Code (the 1964 Edition) ambiguous, and that therefore in their list "patronyms have been emended to represent the man's name with an *-i* added, or a woman's name with *-ae* added. Jennings noted that "single *-i* endings are the choice of most individuals today", though I would argue that this applies primarily to North American ichthyologists, and is true because most of them (as well as the main ichthyological journals there) comply with the American Fisheries Society's official list of names as a standard, rather than with the

original usage. Since, as already noted, the American Fisheries Society introduced the single *-i* ending as a standard, its widespread use is not surprising.

Jennings further argued that a change in the Code is imperative for "Only then can we prevent the inevitable - the undermining of a section of the new [1985] code", though the action of the American Fisheries Society noted above had already done just that. He cautioned that "To deliberately violate any rule of the Code inevitably undermines the confidence in it and such confidence is absolutely imperative to maintain stability in nomenclature". Again, in my view that is precisely what the American Fisheries Society has done. Jennings' argument, then, seems scarcely with the Code at all, but to be based around the fact that what the American Fisheries Society has done to fish names is not consistent with the Code, and for the list to be consistent would require the Society's official list of fish names to be changed, or for the Code to be amended. It is interesting that Jennings recommended the latter, having also expressed concern that the legal authority of the Code should not be undermined!

More recently, Dundee and Smith (1989) have explored this situation, but have much more directly addressed points in the Code. In relation to the rule governing the formation of patronyms, they argued that although "Most users of the Code, including both proponents and opponents of this rule, have assumed that Art. 33(d) requires retention of the original usage of the *-i* or *-ii* endings of eponyms (patronyms or matronyms), ...we propose that this is not the case". In my view they are wrong; the Code does clearly indicate that retention of the original usage is required.

Holdaway (1990) also argued that the provisions of the Code (1985) about the formation of patronyms are ambiguous, though he also appeared not to specify where that ambiguity lies, and it seems to me that he mistook his own confusion about this matter for ambiguity.

Holdaway's (1990) contribution is concerned with much the same issues, though it relates to proposals that the New Zealand Ornithological Society's Checklist of New Zealand birds, like the American Fisheries Society's list of fish names, might also adopt a standard form for the termination of patronyms.

What, then, is Holdaway's argument, and what validity has it? Why does he object to names such as *owenii*, *haastii*? Holdaway's problem appears to be that he considers that, in Article 31, it is "section (a)(ii) [which] specifies the correct ending for those [names] derived from modern names". But, in stating this, he then ignores Article 31(a)(i) which clearly also provides an alternative means of deriving a patronym from a modern name, though this is quite explicit and unambiguous. He is quite incorrect, therefore, in arguing, as he does, that patronyms "must be formed by adding *-i* to the stem of the name, the stem being that used by the original author". And that is why he believes (again incorrectly in my view), that "names formed with the terminal *-ii* must be changed". I think, further, that he is incorrect in stating that such (*-ii*) names are "incorrect original spellings" under Article 32(c), and is consequently and similarly incorrect in arguing that the changes he proposes are "justified emendations" under Article 33(b)(ii).

There is no support for this argument in the Code. It bears repetition that the Code is quite explicit in stating that the specific name *cuvierii* (two *-iis*) is a correct and acceptable patronym derived from the name Cuvier (see below), and it must be equally true that any name so-derived (or in the same form without explicit evidence of derivation), is equally acceptable. By the same argument, *owenii* and *haastii* are also entirely consistent with the Code.

Had Holdaway been completely convinced of the validity of his argument, that the use of the ending *-ii* was incorrect under the provisions of the Code, presumably he would have ended his argument there. But he didn't. He then went on to attempt to justify his position by arguing that early authors who used the *-ii* termination did so ignorantly. As if to strengthen his own position he comments on names coined by ornithologist John Gould, referring to him as "the gardener's son who 'rose from the ranks' as a self-taught taxidermist without the benefit of a public school education", the implication presumably being that Gould would not have known how to Latinise a name or to form a patronym according to the rules of Latin grammar. And having initially ignored the fact that the Code in Article 31(a)(i) clearly and explicitly validates the use of such names as *cuvierii*, he

then argues that names that are covered by the provisions of this article should be accepted as valid only if there is clear evidence that the names had been deliberately Latinised.

Holdaway further argues that "If we base nomenclatural decisions on assumptions about an author's background, rather than on the written evidence, then interpretation of the Code will be even more difficult and its utility diminished". At this point I agree totally with Holdaway, but am confused, therefore, about why he made reference to John Gould, "the gardener's son", and implied that the "author's thoughts" were erroneous.

As was true of Dundee and Smith (1989), Holdaway seems to demand that there should be "internal evidence within publications that it was intended to Latinise" names, but I find nothing in the Code that specifies that the processes of formation of a patronym must be explained by the original author in this detail. I argue, rather, that if the name published by an author is consistent with any of the provisions concerning the formation of patronyms, if the name published could have been derived by an author by any of the approved processes for the formation of patronyms, then such names have to be accepted as valid in their originally published form, and that any attempts to modify them in the way Holdaway proposed are unjustified emendations and should be ignored. Further, although there does not seem to me to be any scope for equivocation about the validity of patronyms with the *-ii* termination (unless it can be clearly shown that an author has applied the provisions of the Code incorrectly), should there be any equivocation, the objective of the Code of maintaining stability in nomenclature must be heeded, and where there is scope for some choice, the chosen name must be that which maintains stability.

I therefore consider it highly fortuitous that the Checklist Committee of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand was so advanced in its publication of a new edition of the Checklist of New Zealand birds that it has been unable to take Holdaway's advice and amend the patronyms for New Zealand birds. If it had done so, it would in my view have perpetuated error, contributed to confusion, and published unjustified emendations of species names. My advice to zoologists is to ignore Holdaway's (1990) recommendations and

to instead use Article 31 of the Code as the authority in making decisions about the spelling of names. In my view this is quite simple and clear, and leaves no scope for equivocation.

A further curious quirk of Holdaway's paper was that he provided a series of bird names that he considered should be amended to conform with his (mis)understanding of the Code. All of his proposed name changes apply to the endings of masculine gender, singular patronyms. He makes no comment about the supposed need for similar changes to be applied to all feminine gender singular matronyms of which there are many applied to New Zealand birds, the commonest being, of course *novaezealandiae* (and variant spellings like *novaezeelandiae*, etc.), which are listed 17 times in the existing New Zealand bird Checklist (Kinsky 1970). If he was consistent, Holdaway would also have insisted on their emendation to *novaezealandae*. He wasn't and he didn't. The American Fisheries Society's Checklist (Robins *et al.* 1980) does not fall into the same trap.

THE CODE AND THE FORMATION OF PATRONYMS

The formation of patronyms is specified in Article 31 of the Code, where it is quite clearly stated that patronyms may be formed either as:

- 1) a noun in the genitive case,
- 2) a noun in apposition,
- 3) an adjective, or
- 4) a participle.

Debate about patronyms however, typically centres almost exclusively around "1)" above, and specifically relates largely to the use of masculine gender, genitive singular names, and whether or not there should be a single or double *-i* as the termination for the name (and this is true for Jennings 1982, Dundee & Smith 1989, and Holdaway 1990). It was also the topic of earlier discussion of mine (McDowall 1988, 1989). I find no ambiguity at all in the Code on this matter, but my attitude depends greatly on how the Code is interpreted with regard to "incorrect spellings".

The Code quite explicitly states that genitive case masculine gender patronyms may be formed in either of two ways:

- 1). By taking the stem, Latinising it, and deriving the genitive case; the Code gives, as an example,

the name Cuvier, which is Latinised to Cuvierius, leading to the genitive *cuvierii*.

2). By taking the personal name and merely adding *i*; the Code again gives as an example the name Cuvier, leading to *cuvieri*.

From this it is quite clear and unequivocal (and it is in fact stated in the Code) that either *cuvierii* or *cuvieri* are acceptable derivations of patronyms from the name Cuvier, and the Code gives no guidance as to which, if either, is to be preferred. (However, it does recommend that the use of patronyms as nouns in apposition is to be discouraged; *ie.* the use of *cuvier* as a patronym is not recommended, though it is not proscribed, either - Recommendation 31A).

Of prime importance to resolving this debate is Article 31(a)(iii) of the Code, which states that: "The original spelling of a species-group name formed under Subsections (i) or (ii) is to be preserved unless it is incorrect". This is further elaborated in Article 32(b), where it is stated that: "The original spelling of a name is the 'correct original spelling', to be preserved unaltered unless it is *demonstrably incorrect* as provided under Section (c) of this Article..." (my italics).

Dundee & Smith (1989) also discuss this question, showing that some authors were inconsistent in their formation of the endings of patronyms, and then point out that in many cases authors did not explicitly indicate how they had formed the name, whether they opted for *-i* or *-ii*. They go on to argue that this inconsistent usage demonstrates either ignorance of or exemption from the rules (though a great many patronyms and probably most of the controversial ones were established before there were any rules at all), and they then take the liberty of making assumptions about what certain authors did, or did not do, when they were forming their patronyms. It is at this point that I part company with Dundee and Smith.

In my view one of the primary purposes of the Code is to provide an environment in which not only are assumptions like this not necessary, but they are prohibited. It is the making of assumptions like these about what authors long ago might or might not have done, typically in the complete absence of any evidence about what they did or did not do, that is one of the downfalls of zoological nomenclature. It is here, that I believe commentators like Dundee & Smith (1989) and Holdaway

(1990) become entangled in misinterpreting and therefore contravening the rules in the Code. In my view, not only are such assumptions leading to breaches of the Code, they are also not required for consistent application of it.

The essence of this issue is to be found in Article 32(b), where it is explicitly stated that the original spelling is to be preserved unless it is "*demonstrably incorrect*". I take "*demonstrably*" to mean that it must be possible to show, *from evidence in the original publication*, that the name was not derived according to the provisions of the Code. The Code does not seem to require, on the contrary, that (as Dundee & Smith argue) there must be evidence that shows how the name was derived.

Clearly, and not surprisingly, in most early descriptions of species there is little or no indication of the way names are derived, but this is no problem. If the form of name used in an original description is **consistent with** having been derived by either of the alternative approved mechanisms for deriving patronyms (whether or not the mechanism for deriving the name is indicated), then such names are valid as originally published, any changes are unjustified emendations, and I suspect that this applies to a substantial number of instances in the American Fisheries Society's official list of names. In fact, it seems to me that the debate in North America (Jennings 1982, Dundee & Smith 1989) is concerned as much with maintaining stability in the American Fisheries Society's list as it is about maintaining stability of the original names.

I do not think it matters whether patronyms have single or double *i* endings; but let us not blame lack of clarity in the Code for making decisions that it does not require or provide for. In my view the Code, in restricting justified emendations to names that are "*demonstrably incorrect*", leaves little room for uncertainty. Spelling of patronyms should not be amended unless they are demonstrably incorrect.

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